



Course report 2023

National 5 Drama

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 4,572

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 4,623

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade.

A	Number of candidates	2,533	Percentage	54.8	Cumulative percentage	54.8	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	1,100	Percentage	23.8	Cumulative percentage	78.6	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	627	Percentage	13.6	Cumulative percentage	92.1	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	262	Percentage	5.7	Cumulative percentage	97.8	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	101	Percentage	2.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, candidate performance in the 2023 question paper was similar to previous years. There was an appropriate balance in the range of questions asked, with most of the questions answered accurately.

There was a mixture of acting and design roles chosen for section 1 responses, with the majority choosing acting.

In section 2, all three stimuli were used, with most selecting stimulus A or B. Candidates developed a wide range of dramas in response to their chosen stimulus. Some candidates did not use the space provided for rough working to note down and develop their ideas.

Candidate responses to section 2 were very rarely filmic, and they observed the additional emphasis placed within the paper to ensure their response to the stimulus was suitable for a live theatrical performance.

Many candidates justified their responses in both sections of the paper by making more explicit reference to their own drama, indicating that key messages from Understanding Standards events and resources are reaching teachers and lecturers and their candidates.

There was an increased number of no responses (NRs) in the question paper this session, but most candidates still completed the assessment in the allotted time.

Performance

Overall, candidate performance within this component remains an area of strength and was similar to previous years. Most centres had prepared candidates well and chosen appropriately challenging texts. Most centres presented candidates that represented the full range of ability across the cohort from the sample of 12 jointly assessed by the visiting and centre assessor.

Visiting assessors commented on the high standard of performances and the positive experience they had visiting centres, engaging in professional and constructive dialogue with centre assessors. The collaborative marking model continues to be a very positive experience for both markers and teachers and lecturers.

A wide variety of plays were used, with over 350 different texts identified across all centres since 2019. Where appropriate texts had been chosen to reflect the personality and range of ability within the group, and candidates had been suitably cast, acting candidates managed to access the full range of marks.

Design candidates were in the minority (less than 20%), but many of those presented achieved an excellent standard. Visiting assessors were impressed by not only their creativity and technical skills in their chosen area, but the knowledge these candidates displayed through research on their text.

Many centres took the option to film their sample of candidates, to be able to engage fully with the appeals service if necessary.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Question 1(a): Most candidates answered this question well and clearly identified the main theme, issue or message, with justification.

Question 1(b): Some candidates didn't achieve marks as their description of one way in which they helped to communicate the main theme, issue or message lacked specific reference to a performance or design concept using correct terminology.

Question 2: Many candidates fully described two activities they carried out during the rehearsal process to prepare for the performance, with specific reference to their drama. Some candidates only achieved 2 marks as they did not fully describe the activities they carried out or made little or no reference to their drama. A few candidates also described the activities from a group perspective, and therefore couldn't access the full range of marks.

Question 3: Some candidates didn't achieve marks as they did not evaluate the effectiveness of their own final performance, instead only describing their concepts. The number of candidates failing to include an evaluative statement within their response to such questions continues to fall, however. Some candidates also failed to use appropriate theatrical terminology in the evaluation of their performance and/or design concepts and were therefore unable to access the available marks.

Question 4(a): Many candidates were able to fully describe one way another drama candidate contributed to the rehearsal process.

Question 4(b): Most candidates answered this question well and identified the mood and/or atmosphere of this candidate's drama, with justification.

Question 4(c): Again, some candidates didn't achieve marks as they did not evaluate the effectiveness of the other drama candidate's final performance in highlighting the mood and/or atmosphere of their drama, instead only describing their concepts. As with question 3, some candidates also failed to use appropriate theatrical terminology in the evaluation of another candidate's performance and/or design concepts, and were therefore unable to access the available marks.

Question 5: Most candidates stated the genre of their drama, the majority being tragedy or drama, with justification.

Question 6: Many candidates didn't achieve marks for this question as they misinterpreted dramatic form as structure and/or style.

Question 7(a): Most candidates identified a relevant setting for their drama.

Questions 7(b) and (c): Many candidates did not access the full range of marks for these questions due to a lack of accurate production terminology in their answers (props and lighting design). Some candidates also failed to relate their description to the setting of their drama, though the marking instructions enabled an implicit link to still be credited.

Question 8(a): Most candidates identified one moment of tension in their drama, with a reason for their answer.

Question 8(b): Some candidates answered this question well and described one convention they would use to highlight this moment of tension in their drama. Some candidates did not access the marks for this question, however, due to a lack of understanding of what a convention is.

Question 9(a): Most candidates answered this question well and identified a character in their drama who they considered to be important, with a reason.

Question 9(b): Most candidates answered this question well and offered an adequate description of the relationship this character has with one other character in their drama. Some candidates gave a full description of this relationship and were able to access the full range of available marks.

Question 9(c): Some candidates described two rehearsal activities that could be used to help the actors understand the relationship between these characters, demonstrating an understanding of the activity in practice and with justification that was specifically related to their drama. Some candidates only achieved 2 marks, as they did not fully describe the rehearsal activities or only justified the ways in which they would help the actors understand the relationship between the characters.

Question 10(a): Many candidates answered this question well and fully described an opinion and/or belief expressed by a character in their drama.

Question 10(b): Many candidates answered this question well and described the way or ways in which they would direct the actor playing this character to use four of the voice and movement terms provided, using appropriate adjectives.

Question 11(a): Most candidates answered this question well and stated the main theme and/or issue of their drama, with specific justification.

Questions 11(b) and (c): Some candidates did not access the full range of marks for these questions due to a lack of accurate production terminology in their answers (set and sound design). Candidates also sometimes failed to relate their description to the theme and/or issue, though the marking instructions again enabled an implicit link to be credited.

Question 12(a): Many candidates answered this question well and identified an appropriate target audience for their drama, with positive justification.

Question 12(b): Some candidates were unable to access the full range of available marks for this question as they didn't fully describe a scene that would appeal to their target audience.

Question 12(c): Many candidates answered this question well and fully described the response or reaction they would want from the target audience when watching this scene.

Performance

Acting

Candidates who had been cast appropriately, in terms of creativity, age appropriateness and challenge, managed to achieve depth and reference textual clues. Most candidates applied skills with appropriate and effective use of voice and movement. Lines and cues were remembered well, relationships were conveyed through interaction, and characterisation was sustained. Some candidates had a superb impact on the audience. Many candidates achieved high marks and had been directed very well by teachers and lecturers, demonstrating a depth of understanding about their character.

In centres where teachers and lecturers had chosen appropriate and interesting texts specifically for their candidates, which allowed for creativity and challenge, candidates did better than those in centres where scenes were repeated by a number of candidates, or where candidates had been allocated unsuitable roles.

The length of some acting pieces varied from the recommended duration. A few pieces were too long. A few were too short, and didn't meet the minimum requirement.

Some teachers and lecturers repeated two or three-hander texts, and didn't offer candidates the opportunity to develop their own individual performance and/or design concepts.

Some texts with larger casts were challenging to mark, as actors with smaller roles were not on stage for the required time and/or lacked adequate interaction with others, making it difficult for such candidates to access the full range of marks.

Design

Many design candidates were technically knowledgeable and executed their role with a good level of skill. Many candidates with appropriately chosen texts showed a flair for design, creativity, originality, and imagination.

Candidates in centres where teachers and lecturers had chosen texts that enabled design candidates to make a significant creative impact did better than those in centres where scenes were chosen specifically for the acting candidates. These scenes had limited opportunity for input by designers, as they did not always allow for an appropriate level of creativity.

Some design candidates did not cover the minimum requirements for their role:

For costume, candidates must produce detailed costume designs and a costume list for all characters. They must create or adapt one costume according to the size, style, and character. Candidates must label, maintain, and store all costumes effectively and carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.

For set design, candidates must produce working designs and plans for the set, including elevations, that are appropriate to the text. They must also produce detailed ground plans for each scene. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.

For lighting, candidates must produce a lighting cue sheet that is accurate in terms of light intensity, cues, duration, and types of lighting changes. They must produce a detailed lighting plot. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor and operate lighting equipment on cue according to levels specified on the cue sheet or sheets during a live performance.

For sound, candidates must produce a sound cue sheet detailing volume, duration, and type. They must source and edit music and effects and provide a back-up plan. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor, and operate sound equipment on cue according to the sound cue sheet or sheets during a live performance.

For props, candidates must produce a master props list. They must design and create one fully functional prop to use in the performance. Candidates must label and store all props effectively, organise the props table efficiently, and carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.

For make-up and hair, candidates must produce designs and charts for all characters. They must select suitable materials and tools and use them safely and hygienically. Candidates must select one character design and apply that make-up and hair design in front of the assessor (other character designs can be applied to actors in advance). Candidates should demonstrate the design under theatrical lighting in a live performance.

A few design candidates were prepared to demonstrate their skills, but there was no performance of the text they had designed for. This meant marks were affected, as the skills must be applied as part of a live performance.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

In section 1, for questions on self and others, candidates should be prepared to evaluate both the process and the performance. All answers are expected to use correct drama terminology throughout, and justification should make specific reference to the candidate's own drama.

When evaluating their own work, candidates must make an evaluative statement within their response. Candidates who do not make an evaluative statement will not be able to access the full range of marks.

When commenting on preparation, candidates should be able to provide a specific description of the activity in which they participated (answers written from a group perspective will not access the full range of marks).

When commenting on performance, candidates should refer to their performance or design concepts using appropriate terminology for their role.

When evaluating someone else, candidates can choose another candidate they have worked with in their own group, or a candidate they have observed within another group. Candidates must be able to evaluate the other candidate's individual contribution and/or final performance.

Responses should always be written from an individual perspective, and not from a group perspective.

In section 2, candidates should be encouraged to use the space provided for rough working to note down their ideas in response to their chosen stimuli, for example with mind maps or plot ideas or character information. A basic 'time, place and action' summary for each scene in the candidate's drama makes it clear they have fully realised how their response to the stimulus would be performed live onstage. This enables them to formulate and work through their ideas and transfer this information into their answers. Candidates who did not utilise this tended to have less detailed or fluid answers in section 2.

Candidates should be encouraged to read all the questions in section 2 before attempting to respond to the stimulus. This allows them to see the through-line of the questions and avoid repetition. Most questions have more than one part — (a), (b), (c), etc, and each element will be connected to the previous question. Candidates should be encouraged to read all parts of a question to avoid duplication, and consider the question as a whole.

Again, candidates should explicitly relate every answer to their own response to the stimulus (referencing characters, plot etc). Candidates who only offer generic justification cannot access the full range of marks.

Many candidates did not understand the command words used in questions: A question asking the candidate to **name**, **identify** or **state** requires them to offer a brief response. A

question asking the candidate to **describe** requires them to respond in some detail. A question asking the candidate to **explain** requires them to offer the purposes or reasons behind the response. A question asking the candidate to **evaluate** requires them to offer a judgement and support it with evidence.

Candidates are expected to use drama terminology and they would benefit from increased knowledge and understanding of all subject-specific vocabulary. Although some candidates answered using terminology, it was clear in many answers that they did not fully understand the vocabulary, concept, or language they were using. Some candidates used very little or no terminology in their answers, especially in section 2. Candidates also used inaccurate adjectives in relation to voice, movement, mood and atmosphere. Lack of terminology for production roles and understanding of the practical application of technical equipment or resources was especially apparent in these cases. Specific guidance on accurate adjectives and design terminology can be found within the Understanding Standards support materials.

The use of production terminology was, in some cases, poor or incorrect. Many candidates supplied generic answers with no real understanding of the application of the production role. Candidates should remember that the drama must be suitable for a live theatrical performance. Therefore, their ideas must be able to be realised, for example sound cannot be described as 'wind' or 'rain' or 'sad music'; this achieves no marks as the answer does not specify whether the sound effect is live or pre-recorded, the level it is to be played at, or the title of the 'sad music'. Similarly, lighting cannot be described as 'bright' or 'dull', as this does not indicate how such an effect would be created, for example the type of lanterns used, specific colour and how this would be achieved, or specific intensity.

Some candidates were unable to provide an imaginative response to the stimuli; many had very simple plots with only two characters that lacked any depth. A few candidates continued to answer on the performance they had identified in section 1 or copied stories from television or films — responses such as these are unable to access the full range of marks for section 2.

Markers are familiar with the tendency for National 5 Drama candidates to create responses to the stimuli that veer towards the tragic or melodramatic, however the responses to stimulus A in particular this year were very dark. They became especially challenging to mark when confronted with similar responses on a regular basis. While the opportunity for creativity and self-expression are key strengths of this qualification, teachers and lecturers encouraging candidates towards greater sensitivity (and positivity) in their dramatic responses is an area that will be addressed through Understanding Standards this session.

Performance

The recommended length of the preparation for performance is approximately 400 words. A review that significantly exceeds this recommended length is not considered to be concise, and therefore it cannot access the top range of marks (9 to 10).

The selected text must be published and be of a suitable standard for National 5. Some traditional Higher and Advanced Higher texts were used, and this was not always appropriate for National 5 candidates. Some visiting assessors commented on candidates struggling to interpret their role adequately when they had used these texts. A list of

recommended texts is given in appendix 3 of the course specification and it can be used as a starting point for centres selecting texts.

Some productions were too short. Centres should make sure minimum and maximum time limits are adhered to.

Some centres chose to repeat texts, especially duologues. Repetition of scenes with similar or identical blocking does not allow candidates to demonstrate their own creativity and interpretation.

Acting candidates should be cast in only one role.

Some design candidates had prepared PowerPoints or presentations to share with the visiting assessor. While these were excellent, this is not a requirement of the course assessment at this level.

The candidate mark sheets and sample sheet should be completed before the visiting assessor arrives. It is useful to have copied the mark sheets before the assessment so centre staff can complete their own copy.

Centre assessors should have a copy of the detailed marking instructions from the course specification when assessing candidates.

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 400 words. It is good practice for candidates to state the word count on their preparation for performance. The preparation for performance should be produced in open-book conditions and must be completed and marked by the centre assessor before the visiting assessor arrives. Many centres had failed to mark the preparation for performance before the visiting assessor arrived. These marks should also be shared with the visiting assessor at the point of review and not withheld by the centre assessor until the collaborative discussion.

Centres must provide a private, quiet space for the visiting assessor to read the preparation for performance responses, and for the visiting assessor and centre assessor to discuss national marking standards and decisions. This space should be for the sole use of the visiting assessor and centre assessor, and not a school room accessed by others during the assessment process. While accommodation in many centres can be challenging, an informal or public space undermines the significance of the assessment event.

It is good practice for the candidates involved in the performance assessment to be present throughout the event and not asked to immediately return to class following their own performance.

While centres remain free to film the performance assessment, the presence of the camera often remains a greater source of focus than it should be, for example teachers and lecturers directing candidates to introduce themselves to the camera immediately before the performance, rather than to the visiting assessor, or the timing of the assessment being determined by the functionality of the recording equipment. The recording should be of the live assessment event and the camera should not be a significant focal point.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).